

was used for communication and eventually for rebellion. Later, songs became conduits for history or political commentary. Still later, music was used to entertain the millions of tourists that flocked to the islands.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the music of the Caribbean became the world's second-most popular and influential, after that of the United States. From the fertile Caribbean emerged *merengue* and *salsa*, *rumba* and *mambo*, *trova* and *nueva canción*, calypso and mento, reggae and ska, *compas*, *soca* and *zouk*. Many of these styles have become extremely popular on every continent. Important salsa and reggae festivals are regularly held in Europe, Asia and the United States. Many Caribbean artists have shot to stardom, including most prominently Harry Belafonte, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Celia Cruz, Gloria Estefan, Ricky Martin, Lauryn Hill, Wyclef Jean, and the Fugees. Yet in spite of all the glamour and the attention these artists and genres have received, traditional folk music still thrives in the villages and towns, often far removed from the glitzy hotels and sandy beaches. Caribbean music is perhaps best expressed in the various festivals in the region, the most prominent of which is carnival, though there are hundreds of other celebrations throughout the region, including Muslim holidays such as Eid-ul-Fitr and Hosay, and Hindu holidays such as Phagwah and Diwali.

Though there are many ways to categorize the various Caribbean styles, perhaps the most logical is to divide them by language, since African traditions blended in similar ways within a specific European culture. The largest and most prominent Spanish-speaking islands are Cuba (capital: Havana), the Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo), and Puerto Rico (San Juan). The principal French-speaking islands are Haiti (Port-au-Prince), Martinique (Fort-de-France), and Guadeloupe (Pointe-à-Pitre). The main English-speaking islands are Jamaica (Kingston), the Bahamas (Nassau), Barbados (Bridgetown), and Trinidad and Tobago (Port-of-Spain). Some islands, such as Dominica and tiny Carriacou, have had a musical tradition and influence that is disproportionate to their size.

### Alan Lomax

Much of the folk music of the Caribbean is extremely well documented, thanks to the efforts of the famed ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, who in 1962 traveled to several islands and recorded much of the music he found there. Many of these traditions have subsequently faded and disappeared from their places of origin, often replaced by more commercial styles from neighboring islands or from the United States. In the course of his investigations, Lomax recognized important connections—which he called “creolization”—between the musics found on the various islands, as well as with the music of African Americans in the southern United States. Lomax’s remastered recordings (with extensive liner notes) have recently been released by Rounder Records in a collection of over 100 CDs that offer a remarkable view of this music.

## CUBA

### Introduction

Cuban music is perhaps the most popular and influential in Latin America. Dancehalls and record stores across the world are wholly dedicated to the sounds and rhythms of this medium-sized island of 12 million inhabitants. Yet one cannot categorize Cuban music into a single style, for the island has been affected by diverse racial, social, historical, and geographical identities. Nothing in Cuba—and certainly not its music—fits neatly into homogeneous categories. Complex racial and class divisions, social prejudices, and political leanings have shaped virtually every aspect of Cuban society, most notably its music: Some styles have been (and continue to be) seen as “White,” associated with the traditional ruling class; others are seen as “African,” often linked with poverty, illiteracy, and, historically, with traditional religions. Most are a complex mixture. Because Cuba was zealously protected from encroachment from the other European powers, the Spanish elements of Cuban culture remained fairly isolated throughout its colonial history, mostly unaffected by English or French developments in the region. While some styles and genres, for example the music associated with some Afro-Cuban religions, have rarely been heard outside the island until recent years, others, such as the *son* and the *rumba*, have had a wide impact on Cuba’s Caribbean and North American neighbors, as well as Europe and Asia. They have even made a full-circle return to Africa, their continent of origin.

### Historical Overview

Cuba is the largest Caribbean island, and it has played central roles in the affairs of two historical world powers. It was the crown jewel of the Spanish Empire, even after larger and sometimes wealthier colonies such as Mexico and Peru came into—and then departed—the Spanish sphere. It was also the last major colony to achieve independence, in 1898. The twentieth century saw its proximity to the United States—it is famously only 90 miles from the Florida coast—become a major factor in its development.

Columbus claimed Cuba for Spain on his first voyage, on October 29, 1492, just two weeks after he arrived on the continent. By 1514, the entire island was conquered by Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, who founded several towns, including Havana, which officially became Cuba’s capital in 1607. Within a few generations, the 300,000 Taíno and Siboney Natives were eradicated, so that by 1557, only about 2,000 remained. Today, little remains of Cuban indigenous music and culture. The island became the first European outpost in the Americas—the first Spanish colony and the first American diocese. It also quickly became one of most lucrative, as the Spaniards established wealthy cattle ranches called *encomiendas*, and later plantations that would produce sugarcane, tobacco, and rum. The colonial period often juxtaposed the gentility of European culture with the brutality of the slave-based agricul-

record of African slaves brought to Cuba dates from 1513, establishing a precedent that would quickly be adopted throughout the Americas, not only by the Spanish, but also by English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese slave traffickers. Between 1521 and 1870, more than 1.5 million slaves were brought to Cuba, almost 10 percent of all slaves brought to the Americas. Traditionally, Cuban slaves had been allowed to purchase their freedom, which led to an increased ethnic and racial melding and the creation of an important Mulatto class.

Because Cuba had been the wealthiest colony—in 1820 it became the world's largest producer of sugar—the Spanish grip remained tighter than elsewhere on the continent. Eventually, however, an independence movement emerged in the 1860s, largely propelled by the Afro-Cuban inhabitants of the island. Slavery was abolished in 1886, and a few years later, the war of independence, led by Antonio Maceo and the poet José Martí, finally led to Cuba's freedom in 1898. Yet Cuba's period of self-determination was short-lived. Sensing Spain's weakness, the neighboring United States saw an opportunity and started the Spanish-American War, which essentially transferred control of Cuba (as well as Puerto Rico and the Philippines) from Spain to the United States. Though Cuba technically gained its independence, in practice it had simply replaced one colonial power with another. For the next six decades, the United States would take an active role in the political, economic, and social life of the island, often supporting corrupt and violent dictatorships in the process. Soon, most of Cuba's farmland, sugar production, manufacturing industries, railways, mining output, and public utilities were owned by U.S. companies. United States tourism became an important part of the economy, and major cities like Havana and Santiago became tourist spots and gambling meccas, replete with high-priced hotels, night-clubs, casinos, and houses of prostitution, many of them connected to U.S. organized crime.

Yet the average Cuban worker profited little from the economic boom, and by the 1950s wide resentment at American excesses began to grow. When Fidel Castro waged an insurgency in the mid-1950s, the second revolution had begun. On January 1, 1959, after a three-year guerilla campaign, Castro's army overthrew the government of Fulgencio Batista and quickly implemented social and economic reforms, which, among other things, nationalized U.S. companies in Cuba. The United States countered by implementing a trade embargo and other measures which effectively pushed the Castro regime into the Soviet sphere. By the early 1960s, Cuba was declared a communist nation. The tensions that followed were marked by events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion (1961) and the Cuban missile crisis (1962). Eventually, a standstill was achieved, and since then, Cuba and the United States have stared at each other uneasily across the 90 miles of water that separates them.

The Castro revolution had a profound effect on the racial composition of the island. Afro-Cubans traditionally have been strong supporters of Castro. In 1959, two-thirds of Cubans were White, the remaining third Mulatto or

the White majority has become an ever-shrinking minority. An important factor in the development of the Cuban nation was the half million Cubans who emigrated, mostly to Miami, in the decades after the revolution. Exercising great political influence in the United States, they saw themselves as the fighting soul of a subjugated people, but in practical terms, the mostly wealthy exiled community was instrumental in exacerbating the continuing entrenchment and enmity between the two countries, and—counter-productively—the continued oppression of the Cuban people. Most of the Cuban émigrés—particularly in the Miami community—are White, and the antipathy between Cuba and Miami has often been charged with racial overtones.

### Instruments and Elements of Cuban Music

The instruments used in Cuban music are derived from a variety of sources, though some emerged on their own as new, original instruments. The most important European instrument in the Caribbean was the guitar. It was introduced into the region early on, and quickly engendered many variations in size, tuning, and number of strings. In Cuba, the most popular guitar is the *tres* or *tres cubano*, a small six-string folk guitar, arranged in three courses of two strings, tuned either in unison or in octaves. Other variations of guitar-like instruments are the cittern and the small *bandurria*, each with 12 strings.

Not surprisingly, given Cuba's important West African roots, a prevalence of percussion instruments has dominated the Cuban sound and engendered an important rhythmic proclivity. *Maracas*, remnants of Cuba's aboriginal Taíno population, are pairs of round gourds filled with dry seeds to which a handle has been attached. Tuned to slightly different pitches, they are shaken rhythmically, one in each hand, to provide a driving percussive presence in the upper registers of Cuban ensembles. The *güiro* is a hollow and serrated calabash gourd that is scraped with a stick or a metal wire scraper. Its origins are Taíno, but Africans quickly adapted it to their own music-making. The *cencerro* (or *ekón*) is a cowbell typically made of copper, and often used to mark the *clave* rhythm. Cowbells can be found in many African and Latin American cultures. *Chéqueres* are gourds draped with beads similar to African shakers. A *quijada de burro* is, literally, a "donkey jawbone," though these days it is often made of wood. It is struck like a cowbell or scraped like a *güiro*.

Most prominent among the numerous Cuban drums are the *congas*, tunable drums played with the palm of the hand. They are made of wood, with a single leather head, and are also known as *tumbadoras* or simply *tumbas*. They come in various sizes, from the large bass *tumba* to the medium *tres por dos* and the small high-pitched *niño* or *quinto*. Perhaps the oldest of the African instruments, it began as a hollow tree trunk covered with goat or antelope hide. Later, the development of European cooperage (or barrel making) allowed for the production of more sophisticated conga drums. Derived from the European timpani, the *timbales* are a pair of short tunable drums, made out of



cowbells and a wood block. **Bongos** are pairs of small drums, one slightly higher pitched than the other, held between the knees and struck with the tips of the fingers. Of African origin, they are used in particular by soloists to show virtuosity. They are also known as *gemelos*, or twins.

*Claves*, also known as *palitos* ("little sticks"), are cylindrical hardwood blocks that are struck together. Again, one is slightly higher pitched than the other. Perhaps no other facet of Cuban music explains the concept of syncretism better than the clave: they are neither African nor Spanish, but a distinctly Cuban creation derived from elements of both cultures. But the word *clave* also refers to a rhythmic pattern that can be played by these and other percussion instruments, including most prominently the *cencerro* cowbell. Many Caribbean genres rely on the rhythmic *clave* as a device that underlies and shapes the music. The most popular, popularly known as the 3-2 *clave*, is shown in Fig. 4.1, a two-measure phrase with a strong syncopation. There are many variations of this clave, most repeating the two-bar figures, either in duple or  $\frac{6}{8}$  time. The clave rhythmic pattern is of West African descent, and musicians in Ghana and Togo use similar devices in their drumming patterns. Other prominent patterns are the *cinquillo* and *tresillo*, shown in Fig. 4.2 and 4.3.

**Montuno:** The term *montuno* has many definitions that are not always grasped by outsiders, even in context. Literally, the term means "from the hills" and refers to the inhabitants of the mountainous regions of the Sierra Maestra, in the Oriente district of Cuba. It is from this region that the *son* developed, and thus the tradition of the *son montuno*. But the term quickly came to describe two specific musical elements of the *son* and later, of salsa: a repeated rhythmic figure that the piano or guitar will vamp on; and the final section of a *son* in which a soloist and chorus alternate lines in a call-and-response style, while the instrumentalists improvise over it.

### The African Roots of Cuban Music

As in many countries in Latin America, Cuban music inherited important characteristics from both its African and European ancestries. But in Cuba, the racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious elements blended and cross-pollinated to an extent not seen anywhere on the continent except perhaps Brazil, so that, even by the beginning of the twentieth century, few of the traditions remained in their pure, original form. The African influences themselves were not homogeneous, but were derived from four major ethnic groups: the Bantu from

from Nigeria; and the Ewe/Fon, from the West African Kingdom of Dahomey, in present-day Ghana, Togo, and Benin.

The most prominent elements of African culture are music and religion, both inexorably linked, and both drawing from Catholic and African traditions. Today, Catholics represent almost half the population; about 2 percent of Cubans follow African-derived religions exclusively and most others practice a hybrid of African and Christian rites. Afro-Cuban religions include the Bantu *palo monte* and *abakua*, as well as the Ewe/Fon *regla arará*, which developed in the Matanzas district. But the most dominant expression of Afro-Cuban religion is Santería ("saint-worship"), which mixes Catholicism with Yoruba rites. While these syncretic religions have rarely been known outside of Cuba until recent years, their music and dance, especially that of Santería, have served as the source of much of Caribbean music for centuries.

**SANTERÍA** Rites and ceremonies related to Santería can go by various names including *lukumi*, *regla de ocha*, *yoruba*, and *espiritismo*. Modern Santería performances range from closed ceremonies in rural villages, to spontaneous drumming and dancing in the streets of Havana, to shiny traveling productions designed mainly for tourists. Santería relies heavily on dancing and music, and particularly on drumming traditions that are specific to various rituals. Both men and women participate in Santería ceremonies. A number of songs and rhythms are performed called *orus*, directed towards the *orishas*, ancestral deities whose origins can be traced to West Africa, where they are still very much present today. The *orishas* represent a link both to the spiritual realm and to the ancestral lands that lay across the Atlantic. To conceal the nature of their beliefs from the Spaniards, African slaves would give them a Christian identity, and over time, the two belief systems came to meld into one syncretic religion. Practitioners pray to their *orisha* while simultaneously singing to the equivalent Christian saint. Conversely, contemporary feast day celebrations will honor the specific saint whose feast it is, but also his or her equivalent *orisha*. The several dozen *orishas* have specific names and characteristics: Ochún is the *orisha* of love, femininity, and rivers, and identified with Our Lady of Charity; Changó is the *orisha* of fire, thunder, lightning, war, and masculinity, and equivalent in Christianity to Saint Barbara; and Babalú Aye, the father of the world, is identified with Saint Lazarus.

The principal means of Santería expression are *bembé* and *batá* drumming and singing, two distinct but closely related traditions. The sacred *batá* drums are three double-headed hourglass-shaped drums whose spiritual force—known as *aña*—is used to communicate with the spirits. The smallest *batá* drum is called *Okónkolo* or *Omelé*, the medium drum is *Itótele* and the largest is *Iyá*, the "mother" of the drums. They are placed horizontally on the player's lap and played on both heads, usually accompanied by the *ekón* cowbell and *chéquere* gourds. The three drums thus produce six distinct sounds that are used to recreate African tonal languages, including prominently that of the Yoruba. A chorus of singers chants liturgical texts in a call-and-response

Cuban *batá* drums and other percussion instruments.

*bembé* ceremonies, which have their own set of drums, *orishas* can take possession of the dancers to communicate with the world.

**Music Example:** “Babalú Ayé” by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, from the CD *Ito Iban Echu: Sacred Yoruba Music of Cuba*.

### CDI, Track 11: Afro-Cuban Ritual: “Yemayá olordo”

**Music and Lyrics:** Traditional

**Instrumentation:** *batá* drums

**Notes:** Yemayá is the Orisha of rivers and the sea. She is also the mother of all living things, and is thus the goddess of fertility and the protector of children. Always appearing in white and blue, she is associated with the Virgin of Regla. In this recording by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, the singer chants incantations to Yemayá in the Yoruba language, to which the choir responds in turn. Meanwhile, the *batá* drums engage in a similar dialogue, exchanging complex cyclic patterns.

**OTHER AFRO-CUBAN RHYTHMS** During the colonial period, slaves and free Blacks were often prohibited from participating in regular celebrations such as carnival or *Día de Reyes* (Epiphany), so they created their own associations called

functions. (Similar organizations existed throughout Latin America, sometimes called *hermandades* or *cofradías* in Spanish and *irmandades* or *cofrarias* in Portuguese.) The *cabildos* performed their own celebrations and street parades named *comparsas*, elaborate affairs with colorful costumes that usually represented the *orishas*. Exotic food and drink were always part of the celebrations, including generous doses of rum and beer, and of course continuous music and dancing. From these *comparsas* emerged a variety of Afro-Cuban music genres, including prominently the *conga* and the *rumba*, which, though they are derived from Santería rhythms, are secular in nature. After independence, these genres continued to flourish, and by the mid-twentieth century, the *comparsas* were often used for political purposes, to endorse or defeat a given candidate. Like the *samba* schools of Brazil, contemporary *comparsas* are organized by city and even by neighborhood, each steeped in traditions that dictate the music, the dancing and the costumes, particularly during the carnival season.

The *conga* (literally, a dance from the Congo) is the principal dance and musical form associated with carnival, and after which the conga drum is named. Starting in the 1940s, Desi Arnaz and others popularized the dance in the United States, where it was called the *conga line*. Thereafter it gained worldwide appeal, probably due to the simplicity of the steps (1-and-2-and-3, kick! 1-and-2-and-3, kick!) and the ease with which large numbers of people can spontaneously break into dance. Other important carnival dances include the *cocoyé* and the *mozambique*.

**Recommended Listening:** “Medley of Carnival Congas” from the CD *Afro-Cuba: A Musical Anthology*.

The *rumba* has its roots in Bantu fertility rites. Traditionally performed with drums and *claves*, it emerged among the sugar plantations on the western side of Cuba and among the dock workers of Matanzas. In the 1930s, various *rumba* bands began popularizing the dance across the island, often in nightclubs and cabarets. Soon thereafter, the *rumba* was introduced to the United States and became popular worldwide. In its new international incarnation, it became infused with jazz and popular elements and eventually became an important ballroom dance. Variations of the *rumba* include the *yambú*, a slow dance for couples; the *columbia*, a dynamic dance for men designed to show off manly attributes; and the *guaguancó*, an intensely suggestive dance which involves male pelvic thrusts called *vacunao* (“vaccination,” symbolizing sexual penetration), while the female dancer performs the *botao* (“rejection”), defending her honor by using her skirt to prevent him from getting too close. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, other important Afro-Cuban dances emerged including the *gatatumba*, the *cumbé* (or *paracumbé*), the *cariaco*, the *masucamba*, the *mulata*, the *sopimpa*, and the *zarambeque*, though many of these dances have since vanished. Since the 1950s, the most famous proponents of Afro-Cuban rituals have been Los Muñequitos de Matanzas.

**Recommended Listening:** “Parece mentira” by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, from the CD *Rumba caliente*.

African characteristics have remained important in modern popular songs, which still make references to the *orishas* and make use of complex rhythms. Santería itself has become an important religion that transcends the shores of the island. Like vodou in Haiti and *candomblé* in Brazil, it remains both a serious religious experience and a way for clever entrepreneurs to infuse the music and culture with exoticism. Afro-Cuban music, already powerful on its own merits, is often “complemented” by a certain dangerous exoticism in glossy production designed to appeal to tourists, excited by what they perceive as primal drums and the sight of chicken blood. Yet in the villages of the Cuban interior, musicians continue to perform the rhythms that their ancestors played in Cuba and before that in Africa itself.

### The Spanish Roots of Cuban Music


Throughout much of the colonial period, music was divided according to social, economic, and racial lines. While the Black and Mulatto slaves (and, later, working classes) developed their African-based rhythms, the White elite favored the songs and dances of their European heritage. The style that comes closest to a pure Hispanic expression is that of the *guajiros*, rural farmers from the eastern part of the island whose Spanish ancestry dates back to the early days of the colony. *Guajiras* are wistful and melancholy ballads that evoke the Spanish homeland. They make extensive use of Spanish poetic forms such as the *punto* and the *décima*, as well as the competitive *controversia*, in which two singers improvise lyrics in a contest of verbal skill. The instrumental accompaniment usually consists of guitars and other Spanish colonial string instruments, with occasional percussion instruments.

In colonial cities, poor Whites and Mulattos also developed their own popular songs called *guarachas*, associated with bars, brothels, and places of ill repute. *Guarachas* were loosely based on the refined Spanish *tonadilla*, but their style was coarse and unsophisticated. *Guarachas* are in two parts, a fast section in triple meter and a slower section in duple meter. Played with guitar and *tres* accompaniment, their suggestive lyrics are humorous observations of everyday life or satirical critiques of local officials. *Guarachas* also engendered a dance that was equally suggestive, to the point of being scandalous. In the nineteenth century the *guaracha* was exported to Puerto Rico where it continued to evolve. In the twentieth century, the Cuban *guaracha* was absorbed by many of the rhythmically intense popular styles that emerged on the island and in New York. Many of the subsequent *son* and *salsa* singers—most prominently Celia Cruz—came to be known as *guaracheras*.

**Recommended Listening:** “Lagrimas Negras” by Los Guaracheros de Oriente, from the CD *Cuba Romantica: Nostalgia Guajira*.

### Cuban Dance Music

In rural areas, the Spanish-derived *zapateado* was widespread, while in the

FIG. 4.4: Habanera Rhythm Pattern:  $\frac{2}{4}$  

minuets, waltzes, quadrilles, and *rigodones* that were popular in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Particularly popular in the salons of the Cuban upper classes was the *contradanza*, related to the French *contredanse* and any number of English figure dances. Unlike these, which were danced by the group as a whole, the *contradanza* was danced by couples, and led by a caller called the *bastonero*. It consisted of four set figures: the slow *paseo* and *cadena*, followed by the fast *sostenido* and *cedazo*.

It was not long before Cubans were developing their own dances, including the famous *habanera* (literally, a dance from Havana), with its African syncopations and swaying rhythms (see Fig. 4.4). One *habanera* known as “El areglito,” written by the Spanish composer Sebastian Yradier in the 1840s, was picked up by Georges Bizet who inserted it into his opera *Carmen*. It quickly became the most famous *habanera* in the world. Since then, various other European composers have written their own versions of the suggestive dance.

**Recommended Listening:** “La habanera” by Ernesto Lecuona, from the CD *Lecuona Plays Lecuona: Ultimate Collection*.

Despite its African rhythmic influence, the *habanera*, along with other dances such as the *garande* and the *guiriguay*, mostly reflected the European proclivities of the Spanish gentility, in great contrast to the lively rhythms emanating from the drums in the slave quarters. Yet this division was not destined to last much longer. By the middle of the nineteenth century, European dances were slowly becoming “Africanized,” infused with the syncopation that characterizes rhythms such as the *clave* and the *cinquillo*, and as such came to be adopted by the urban working classes, performed in the dancehalls that dotted the slums of Havana, Matanzas, and Santiago. The White gentility vehemently resisted these developments, objecting to the large numbers of Afro-Cuban musicians and dancers, and especially to what they perceived as inflammatory and subversive rhythms, which lent the new dances a pronounced sensuality. But like most attempts to control the direction of popular trends, their efforts proved futile in the end. For the next century, Afro-Cuban cultural elements continued to displace the power structures of the White elite, though not without struggles and protestations.

Examples of these new dances included the *cariaco*, the *caringa*, the *chanchamele*, and the *apobanga*. Some were short-lived, while others, such as the *upa* and *merengue*, made their way to neighboring islands and strongly influenced the Dominican Republic. In Cuba, the most lasting result of this stylistic evolution was a new hybrid genre called the *danzón*. Created by bandleader Miguel Failde in Matanzas in the 1870s, it combined African rhythms with European-style dancing. *Danzón* was played by a European-style string-and-wind orchestra, with flute and violin improvisations, that also included a piano, bass, and percussion instruments such as the timbales and the *güiro*.

society, the more exotic *danzón* quickly became popular throughout the island, especially among the Black and Mulatto populations. It also became associated with the wars of independence at the end of the century, and thus became the first important nationalistic style in Cuba. It continued to gain popularity after 1900, as did dance offshoots such as the *danzonete*, the *charanga*, and the *chachachá*. Important twentieth-century performers of these styles include the Orquesta Original de Manzanillo and the Orquesta Aragon.

**Recommended Listening:** “La Patti Negra” by Orquesta de Pablo Valenzuela, from the CD *Cuban Danzón: Before There Was Jazz*.

**Recommended Listening:** “Negra Bombón” by Arcaño y sus Maravillas, from the CD *Melao*.

**Recommended Listening:** “El Bodeguero” by Orquesta Aragon, from the CD *Cuban Originals: Orquesta Aragon*.

**SON MONTUNO** The *son montuno*, another syncopated dance style popularized by nightclub bands, is the most important genre in Cuban music. The *son* existed in Spain before the Conquest, and it was transmitted to many parts of Latin America, but especially to Cuba and Mexico. (The Mexican *son* is explored in Chapter 3). The Cuban *son montuno* first emerged during the period of independence in the mountainous regions of the Sierra Maestra in the Oriente (eastern) province. It had a smaller orchestration than the *danzón* and other popular music of the time: Guitars replaced the wind and string sections, and a strong emphasis was put on percussion: *clave*, maracas, *güiro*, and bongos. Occasionally, a trumpet and double bass were added to the ensemble. A typical *son* has a melodic opening section called *largo*, followed by a rhythmic *montuno*, in which the soloist will improvise short lines and the chorus repeats a given phrase, in call-and-response fashion.

Amidst the chaos of the first decade of Cuban independence, the *son* outgrew its rural origins and in the 1910s made its way to Havana, where it quickly adopted some of the characteristics of the *guaracha*, and was quickly banned by the authorities as subversive. In an ironic twist, the Black and working class *son* was seen as a threat to the established and elegant *danzón*, though a generation earlier it was the latter that had been attacked for precisely the same reason.<sup>1</sup> Once again, though, the new style quickly became popular in Havana—even in the salons of the elite—and soon engulfed the rest of the island. The first generation of important *son* bands in the 1910s and 1920s included the Sexteto Habanero, the Sexteto Occidente, and Ignacio Piñeiro’s Septeto Nacional.

**Recommended Listening:** “Tres Lindas Cubanas” by the Sexteto Habanero, from the CD *Sextetos y septetos cubanos*.

<sup>1</sup>A similar ironic parallel occurred in the United States with the advent of both jazz in the 1920s and rock and roll in the 1950s. Both faced accusations of being “too Black” and therefore subversive. But many members of the generation that had earlier embraced jazz later came to repudiate rock and roll for the same reason. In turn, the rock and roll generation often reacted negatively to

**Recommended Listening:** “Echale salsita” by the Septeto Nacional de Ignacio Piñeiro, from the CD *50 Aniversario: Septeto Nacional de Ignacio Piñeiro*.

**Recommended Listening:** “El Son de la Loma” by the Septeto Nacional de Ignacio Piñeiro, from the CD *Son de la loma*.

### CDI, Track 12: *Son Montuno*: “Mayeya, No juegues con los santos”

**Music and Lyrics:** Ignacio Piñeiro (1928)

**Instrumentation:** guitar, tres, bass, trumpet, clave, bongos

**Notes:** This *son* by the legendary Septeto Nacional invokes the spirits of Santería to ensure a lover’s faithfulness. The warning not to toy with the spirits is reinforced by references to the necklaces of the Orishas, the colors yellow (an allusion to the *orisha* Ochún) and blue (Yemayá), and the summoning of Ori Baba in the *montuno* section (which begins at 1:30).

Mayeya, no quiero que me engañes, Respetá los collares, No juegues con los santos.	<i>Mayeya, do not deceive me, Respect the necklaces, Do not toy with the spirits.</i>
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No pretende engañarme con ese cuento, Porque todo’ en Cubita no conocemos. El que no lleva amarillo, se tapa con azul.	<i>Don’t pretend to deceive me with that tale, Because we all know each other in Cuba. He who does not wear yellow, covers himself with blue.</i>
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#### Montuno

Entra Ori Baba . . .

*Come, Ori Baba . . .*

By the 1930s and 1940s, the number of *son* bands had grown exponentially. Up until this period, conga drums had been prohibited because of their potential for social and racial unrest. The prohibition ended in the 1930s, and many *soneros* quickly began using congas to deepen the rhythm section of their orchestras, giving the style a percussive boost that would further enhance its popularity. This period also saw the rise of many of the luminaries of Cuban music including La Sonora Matancera, Trio Matamoros, Compay Segundo, Chano Pozo, Beny Moré, the bass player Israel “Cachao” López, and the blind and colorful bandleader Arsenio Rodríguez.

*Sones* can be classified into many categories. The most prominent is the *son montuno* (“from the hills”). Other types include the *conjunto*, *changüi* (from Guantánamo), and the *sucu-sucu* (from the island of La Juventud). Hybrid versions of the *son* have also emerged, with hyphenated names that display the fusion of the genres: *son-bolero*, *son-Afro-Cubano*, *son-guajira*, *son-pregón*, and *son-guaracha*. The most famous *son* is undoubtedly “Guantanamera,” written in 1908 by José Martí. From the 1930s to the 1950s, it was the most popular song in Cuba.

independence fighter José Martí. It tells the story of a young *guajira* from the town of Guantánamo, and to this day has remained a worldwide symbol for Cuban music and culture.

**Recommended Listening:** “Guantanamera” by Compay Segundo, from the CD *Calle Salud [New Version]*.

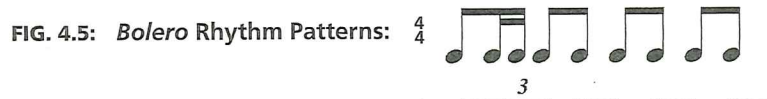
After 1950, the *son* began branching out in different directions. One branch continued to expand and evolve into a louder and flashier style. Piano and trumpets were added, and eventually electric keyboards and bass joined the ensemble. Percussion sections were expanded, notably with the addition of timbales, setting the stage for the *salsa* phenomenon that would emerge in the 1970s. Meanwhile, a more traditional branch of *son* quietly continued to emphasize the subtlety of its early *guajiro* and Afro-Cuban roots, and for decades continued to entertain audiences in the neighborhoods of Havana. In the 1990s, some of these early *soneros* made an international splash when they were reintroduced as The Buena Vista Social Club, a makeshift group which included Compay Segundo, Ibrahim Ferrer, Eliades Ochoa, and the *bolero* singer Omara Portuondo. The success of the group revived not only the traditional *son*, but also the *bolero* and *trova* that had been popular at mid-century. Though the recording project—and the accompanying Oscar-winning film—suggest that these musicians were relics of a pre-revolutionary nostalgic era, awaiting “rediscovery,” they had in fact been active musicians during most of their lives, and had continued to promote a style that had never been abandoned, let alone forgotten.

**Recommended Listening:** “Chan-Chan” by The Buena Vista Social Club, from the CD *Buena Vista Social Club*.

**Recommended Viewing:** The documentary film *The Buena Vista Social Club* (1999).

### The Cuban Song Tradition: Trova and Bolero

In addition to the Afro-Cuban drumming genres like the *rumba* and to the syncretic dances such as the *danzón* and the *son*, there is another equally important tradition in Cuba: the popular song. Two distinct styles of popular song have emerged from Cuba in the past century and a half: the *trova* and the *bolero*. Both were shaped by Spanish *zarzuela* and *flamenco* singing, as well as by nineteenth-century popular songs in Spain, Mexico, and other Spanish-speaking countries. The word *trova* has its roots in the medieval itinerant singer/songwriters known as *troubadours* and *trouvères*. The *bolero* was a dance first popularized—perhaps even invented—in the 1780s by the Spanish dancer Sebastian Cerezo, who introduced it at the Spanish court. Yet the Spanish dance, which is in triple meter, is only distantly related to the Cuban song form, which is typically in duple meter (see Fig. 4.5).



Like so much Cuban music, both the *trova* and *bolero* first emerged in the eastern part of the island, in and around Santiago. *Trovas* and *boleros* were unapologetic in their romanticism, speaking of love (usually unrequited), the sorrow of longing, the anger of jealousy, and the pain of betrayal. But they also spoke of freedom and revolution, particularly at the turn of the nineteenth century, when independence was a common cause. Whether the singer was a lovelorn romantic or an idealistic revolutionary, the guitar was always a faithful companion with whom one shared one's troubles. A syncopated guitar strumming called *ravado* added a particular poignancy to the songs. An important characteristic of both *trova* and *bolero* is the combination—and often juxtaposition—of major and minor keys, a facet found throughout Latin American song styles, for example in the Ecuadorian *pasillo*. The use of both modes nicely corresponds to the emotional ambivalence of the themes of these songs, which speak simultaneously of love and pain, of optimism and pessimism, of hope and despair. Often, the verse will begin in the minor key, turning to a more hopeful major key in the refrain, only to return to the gloom of the minor in the next verse.

One of the first important *trovas* was “La bayamesa”—“the girl from Bayamo,” an eastern town steeped in Cuban history. Founded in 1513, it is Cuba's second oldest town and is also the place where the Cuban independence movement first made its stand in 1868. The rebel leader Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, remembering a song he had composed for a girlfriend decades earlier, now wrote new patriotic words for it, and “La bayamesa” quickly became popular among the revolutionary fighters. After independence, it became the national anthem and remains so to this day.

José Pepe Sánchez, born in 1856, became the father of the Cuban *bolero* when he wrote “Tristezas”. He was also an important singer and teacher, and was influential on an entire generation of songwriters who popularized the *trova* and *bolero*. The most important of these was certainly the long-lived singer Sindo Garay, who wrote yet another song entitled “La bayamesa”, and who introduced innovations in guitar playing and harmony singing. The *trova* and *bolero* traditions thrived in nineteenth-century Havana, popular with the theater-and-café crowd, and eventually in the elite social circles of the capital. The *trovadores* themselves lived vicarious, bohemian lifestyles that fueled their creativity. By the twentieth century, new artists began to emerge, including Maria Teresa Vera, the first of many female Cuban stars, and whose *trova* “Veinte años” became a classic. Perhaps the most important *trovador* in the twentieth century was Ignacio Villa, nicknamed Bola de Nieve (“Snowball”), whose particular refined vocal ability made him an international star.

**Recommended Listening:** Trova: “La bayamesa” by the Buena Vista Social Club, from the CD *Buena Vista Social Club*.

**Recommended Listening:** Trova: “Veinte años” by Maria Teresa Vera, from the CD *Veinte años*.

**Recommended Listening:** *Bolero*: “Tristezas” by Trio Los Soles, from the CD *Historia del Bolero en el Siglo XX, Vol. 1*.

In the 1920s, the *bolero* was adopted by the *son* orchestras, and a hybrid was born, the *bolero-son*, songs with traditional structure and rhythm, but now with the orchestration of the *son*, and with the added *montuno* chorus. *Soneros* such as Beny Moré quickly adopted the *bolero* and made it their own. The *bolero* continued to adapt to the changing styles, and new hybrids kept appearing, including the *bolero-mambo*, the most popular of which was “Quizás, quizás,” by Osvaldo Farrés.

**Recommended Listening:** *Bolero-son*: “Siboney” by the Sexteto Nacional, from the CD *Music of Cuba: 1909–1951*.

**Recommended Listening:** *Bolero-mambo*: “Quizás, quizás” by Desi Arnaz and His Orchestra, from the CD *Babalu*.

In the 1940s, the *bolero* was transformed yet again, adopted by a new ensemble that came to typify the style for the next several decades: the guitar trio. This was considered the golden age of the *bolero*, as trios from Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico became extremely popular throughout Latin America. (The *bolero*'s golden age is further explored in Chapter 3). Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the *trova* and the *bolero*—and a new offshoot, the *filín*—continued to evolve and yield fine compositions, maintaining an important following in Spanish-speaking countries. With the advent of rock and roll, however, Latin music in general lost some of its international luster, and the *trova* and *bolero* fell to the wayside, popular mostly with an older generation that associated the song styles with a deep sense of nostalgia. In Santiago, the establishment of the state-sponsored salon *La Casa de la Trova* in 1968, dedicated to preserving and performing songs in the old style, was soon followed by the emergence of similar establishments all over Cuba. Today, fans flock to these houses of music to take in a style that once appeared to be moribund. By the same token, recent artists have undertaken to revitalizing the old *bolero* tradition, resurrecting the songs that the trios played decades earlier.

**Recommended Listening:** “Adoro” by Los Tri-O, from the CD *Parece que fue ayer*.

**Recommended Listening:** “Contigo aprendí” by Lucrecia, from the CD *Mis boleros*.

### Cuban Music Leaves the Island

The U.S. presence in Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century greatly stimulated its music, and some of the most famous Cuban musicians got their start at the countless nightclubs on the island, notably the famous Tropicana nightclub that opened in 1939. As had been the case for centuries, foreign styles continued to influence the development of Cuban music, this time

Sinatra and Nat King Cole, and jazzmen such as Dizzy Gillespie and Stan Kenton. In turn, North Americans took in the mysterious exoticism of the Latin rhythms, which conveyed a hot, sultry, even dangerous atmosphere. It wasn't long before elegant and sophisticated Cubans with ruffled shirts and long evening gowns became the rage in the streets of New York, both on Broadway and in predominantly Hispanic East Harlem. This was the beginning of the so-called “Latin Craze,” a movement in the United States and Europe that revered the music of Latin America, particularly Cuba, but also other Latin American styles and artists, notably the Brazilian Carmen Miranda and the Peruvian Yma Súmac. This rage for all things Latin would continue for two decades, finally abetting with the advent of rock and roll in the late 1950s.

The first Cuban musician to make it big in the United States was Don Azpiazu and His Orchestra, who in 1930 arrived in New York with the singer Antonio Machín and the song “El manisero” (“The Peanut Vendor”). The song became one of the biggest hits of the era, and brought about a craze for Cuban culture and music. Many artists quickly followed suit, including Xavier Cugat, Miguelito “Mr. Babalú” Valdés, and Machito and his Afro-Cubans. The most famous of these early émigrés was Desi Arnaz, who popularized the conga in the United States, and who would later have a second career as the husband and co-star of television's Lucille Ball. In later years, this generation of Cuban musicians working in the United States came to be known, mostly inaccurately, as “the Mambo Kings.” By the 1940s, many dancehalls and nightclubs in New York had sprung up that were dedicated exclusively to Latin—and especially Cuban—music. These included the Copacabana and the Palladium, both of which would rival the Tropicana in Havana for years to come. The bands that played at these nightclubs popularized hundreds of Cuban songs and dances that were often categorized under the rubric *rumba* (or even the misspelled *rhumba*) though in fact these pieces had little to do with the Afro-Cuban dance of that name, and were more akin to the *son* or *danzón*.

**Recommended Listening:** “El manisero” by Don Azpiazu, from the CD *Don Azpiazu & His Havana Casino Orchestra*.

**Recommended Viewing:** For a glimpse of the New York Latin Music scene in the 1950s, see the film *The Mambo Kings* (1992).

By the late 1940s, another genre began supplanting the pseudo-*rumba* craze. This was the famous *mambo*, which combined *rumba* rhythms with a jazzy Big Band sound. Never one of the traditional dances of Cuba, the *mambo*'s exact origins remain unclear. It seems to have emerged in Havana in the 1930s, and several musicians lay claim to its invention. In any event, the undisputed king of the *mambo* was Pérez Prado, who infused Cuban rhythms with a wildly original style. His sparse but dramatic orchestral arrangements which emphasized brass instruments, his complicated steps, designed to maximize the drama, and his famous “huh!” shout at important structural points made the



where he became instantly successful as a band-leader, and from where his songs became known throughout the world. Together the new *rumba* and the *mambo* fueled the worldwide frenzy for Latin music in the 1940s and 1950s. In Britain, the ballroom dance studio of Pierre and Doris Lavelle were the first to set formal choreography to these dances, and as a result they would become staples of ballroom dancing for decades to come.

**Recommended Listening:** “¡Qué rico el mambo!” by Pérez Prado, from the CD *The Original Mambo King*.

Inevitably, the new exotic sounds were bound to fuse with the other popular music that had dominated the North American music scene during that same period: jazz. Because of the syncopated rhythms that found their origins in Africa, Cuban music was a natural fit with jazz. Afro-Cuban jazz quickly became popular in both countries, and increasingly Cuban bands made appearances at such hallowed jazz spots as the Apollo and the Cotton Club. It was not long before U.S. jazz leaders such as Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Kenton, and Charlie Parker sought out Cuban percussionist to play in their bands, including Chano Pozo, Patato Valdés, and Ramon “Mongo” Santamaría.

**Recommended Listening:** “Mango Mangue” by Charlie Parker and Machito and His Orchestra, from the CD *South of the Border: The Verve Latin-Jazz Sides*.

A key figure in the evolution of Cuban music was Tito Puente, a New Yorker of Puerto Rican origin. Born in Spanish Harlem in 1923, he was a continuous presence in the New York Latin music scene for more than 60 years, bridging the two waves of Latin music popularity. A child prodigy who later studied at Juilliard, he played with—and absorbed the styles of—many of the Cuban musicians that were all the rage in the 1940s, including Machito and Arsenio Rodríguez. Despite his youth and origins, he came to be identified with that generation of Cuban “Mambo Kings.” He was a virtuoso percussionist, particularly on the timbales and the vibraphone, and he composed and expertly arranged much of his own music. His concerts always exuded great energy and showmanship. In the 1950s, Puente continued to collaborate with musicians such as Mongo Santamaría, Johnny Pacheco, and Ray Barretto, contributing to every Latin style during that period, including the *danzón*, the *mambo*, the *chachachá*, Latin jazz, Big Band music, and even the *bossa nova*. In 1952, at age 29, he was invited to a Cuban event that celebrated a half century of Cuban music—the only non-Cuban musician so invited. In the 1970s, Puente became a major force in the development of *salsa*. His song “Oye cómo va,” released in 1962, did not emerge onto the national consciousness until another Latin musician, the young Carlos Santana, covered it in 1970, whereupon it became a huge rock hit. Puente often joked that he had been disgruntled that Santana’s meteoric rise had been based in part on Puente’s song, but his annoyance quickly dissipated when Santana’s royalty checks began to ar-

Mambo,” but he was often known simply as “El Rey”—The King. Puente died in 2000, having released more than 100 albums.

**Recommended Listening:** “Ran Kan Kan” and “Oye Como Va” from the CD *Oye Como Va: The Dance Collection*, by Tito Puente.

The United States was not the only country where Cuban music became popular. Because of its proximity, Mexico became an important destination for Cuban composers, singers, and bandleaders, notably Tomás Ponce, Beny Moré, and Pérez Prado. In particular, the Yucatan Peninsula and the Gulf Coast shared with Cuba an ethnic and historical background, reflected in their common Caribbean sensibilities. It was often easier for residents of Veracruz and Merida to reach Havana than Mexico City. The *danzón* and the *bolero* became very popular in Mexico, which in turn developed its own style of Romantic song and social dances. (See Chapter 3.) Many Cuban musicians also migrated to Europe in the twentieth century, including Antonio Machín, who went to Spain in the 1930s. Paris became an important center for Cuban—and thereafter all of Latin American—music, particularly at the famed La Coupole nightclub, which to this day offers nightly salsa dancing and music.

### Cuban Music Since the Revolution

The 1960s were not kind to Cuban music in general, whether in Havana and Santiago or in New York and Miami. The reasons have less to do with politics than with the youth-oriented explosion of popular culture that emerged during that decade. As virtually everywhere else in the world, the predominance of U.S. and British pop and rock and roll had a very depressing effect on Cuban music. In this context, Latin rhythms came to be seen as old-fashioned icons associated with an older generation not to be trusted. The 1959 revolution also unquestionably altered Cuba’s musical evolution, though in the long run, Castro’s socialist regime became an important supporter of the music landscape. The most visible consequence was the emigration of several prominent musicians who left Cuba for greener pastures, typically to the United States. The earlier musical exodus of the so-called “Mambo Kings” continued after 1959, but now with far less fanfare. Musicians such as Olga Guillot and La Lupe appealed to new audiences in New York and Miami, while the legendary *son* band La Sonora Matancera, which featured a young singer named Celia Cruz, now found itself permanently performing in the United States. Cruz’s success came from her ability to inject the Santería rhythms she had learned in her youth into the *son* and *guaracha* styles performed by the Sonora Matancera.

At home, the immediate effects of the revolution were severe, as tourism ground to a halt and the nightlife momentarily dried up. Within a few years, however, the government adopted a traditional socialist plan, with generous state support of musicians, but also with government censorship and restrictions on content. The regime unfailingly provided economic support for arts and culture, including relatively high salaries and free health care and education. While the biggest stars often went into exile for lucrative contracts



Tito Puente and Celia Cruz.

ordinary musicians usually found their situation improved by the regime change. Moreover, the government's hostility towards American pop and rock, which it viewed as capitalistic and decadent, resulted in the preservation, more-or-less intact, of some of the styles that had propelled Cuban music prior to the revolution. The old *soneros* who had come to prominence decades earlier still maintained an important presence. Cuba relied on its rich tradition, and the *sones* of yesteryear were glorified as the "authentic" legacy of the island.

But new developments began popping up as well. The *pachanga* and the *pilón* became popular—if short-lived—dance styles in the early 1960s. Perhaps the most popular group during this period was Los Zafiros, who offered a Latin version of the doo-wop groups that had been popular in the United States for over a decade. New bands included Irakere, with Chucho Valdes, Paquito D'Rivera, and Arturo Sandoval, who continued to experiment with jazz and *son* rhythms. The pop-oriented Los Van Van offered an accessible sound and style that, not incidentally, was ideologically in tune with the Castro regime. As in most socialist states, the artistic course has been shaped to a great extent by ideology and politics. Even as some forms of expression were supported and touted as great achievements of Cuban culture, censorship prevented others from emerging and evolving. The bottom line is that for half a century, Cuban music more or less continuously maintained its place among the most vibrant and original musical styles in the world.

**NUEVA TROVA** In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a continent-wide folk song

ideological movements of the twentieth century. It occurred spontaneously throughout North and South America, embodied particularly in the Chilean *nueva canción* (explored in Chapter 9). In the United States, the movement was epitomized by singers such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, who attempted to bring a degree of seriousness to a culture that was too often dominated by light-weight glossy rock and roll. Much of the music consisted of socially committed protest songs that were solidly grounded in left-wing politics and concepts of social justice. This youth-oriented music was often initially rejected as evidence of an insidious counterculture by the governments they criticized.

Revolutionary Cuba was ideologically in tune with this movement. The old *trova* song tradition, though never abandoned, had seen a dramatic decline in popularity since its heyday in the first half of the century. Like their counterparts across the globe, Cuban youth looked down on the romantic song and dance styles of their elders, and instead embraced a new singing style that merged political consciousness with the guitar songs from earlier in the century. This new revitalized version of the *trova* was called, originally enough, *nueva trova*, while the old style came to be known as *vieja trova* or *trova tradicional*. In the years leading up to and following the Revolution, Fidel Castro looked to contemporary revolutionary songs as a serious counter to the fluff that dominated U.S. airwaves. The most famous of these was Carlos Puebla's "Hasta siempre Comandante," which told the melancholy story of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, one of the heroes of the Cuban Revolution. Ironically, many other protest songs were originally viewed with suspicion by the Castro regime, though by the late 1960s, *nueva trova* musicians were widely accepted across the island, and throughout the Spanish-speaking world. The movement was officially recognized in 1967 with the Encuentro de la Canción Protesta, a music festival in Havana that brought together dozens of musicians from 18 countries across the hemisphere and that spawned hundreds of similar festivals in subsequent years. The most important of the Cuban *nueva trova* singer-songwriters were Silvio Rodríguez, Noel Nicola, Vicente Feliú, Pablo Milanés, and Sara González.

**Recommended Listening:** "Yolanda" by Pablo Milanés, from the CD *Cancionero*.

**Recommended Listening:** "Unicornio" by Silvio Rodríguez, from the CD *Cuba Classics 1: Canciones Urgentes*.

### CDI, Track 13: *Nueva Trova*: "Hasta siempre Comandante"

**Music and Lyrics:** Carlos Puebla (1965)

**Instrumentation:** guitar, bass, conga drums, maracas, bongos

**Notes:** After the assassination of Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Bolivia in 1965, his iconic image became a counterculture symbol around the world. This melancholy salute to the revolutionary hero, here performed by the composer Carlos Puebla, remains a powerful

hymn in Cuba and throughout Latin America. The opening guitar figure serves as a transition between verses and chorus. The percussion lends this performance a sultry feeling that reflects the mystery of the man who had become a legend even before his death.

**Spoken:** La primera canción esta escrita cuando nuestro comandante en jefe leyó la carta de despedida del Che.

Aprendimos a quererte  
Desde la histórica altura,  
Donde el sol de tu bravura  
Le puso un cerco a la muerte.

#### Chorus

Aquí se queda la clara,  
La entrañable transparencia,  
De tu querida presencia  
Comandante Che Guevara.

Tu mano gloriosa y fuerte  
Sobre la historia dispara,  
Cuando todo Santa Clara  
Se despierta para verte.

Vienes quemando la brisa  
Con soles de primavera,  
Para plantar la bandera  
Con la luz de tu sonrisa.

Tu amor revolucionario  
Te conduce a nueva empresa,  
Donde esperan la firmeza  
De tu brazo libertario.

Seguiremos adelante  
Como junto a ti seguimos.  
Y con Fidel te decimos:  
Hasta siempre Comandante.

**Spoken:** *The first song was written when our commander-in-chief [Fidel Castro] read Che Guevara's farewell letter.*

*We learned to love you,  
From the historical heights,  
Where the sun of your courage  
Put a barrier around death.*

#### Chorus

*Here remains the clear,  
Heart-warming transparency  
Of your beloved presence  
Comandante Che Guevara.*

*Your strong and glorious hand  
Takes a shot at history,  
When the whole of Santa Clara  
Awakens to see you*

*You come burning the breeze  
With suns of spring,  
To plant the flag  
With the light of your smile*

*Your revolutionary love  
Leads you to new missions,  
Where they await the firmness  
Of your liberating arm.*

*We shall go on,  
Together we'll follow you.  
And with Fidel we say:  
Till forever Comandante*

Meanwhile, in the United States, Latin music's decline in popularity led to the closing of many prominent nightclubs, most notably the Palladium in 1964. A brief craze, the soul-influenced *boogaloo*, had a surge in the late 1960s, spurred by Ray Barretto's "El Watusi" and Joe Cuba's "Sock It to Me Baby", but it too proved to be short-lived. Cuban music—indeed, Latin music in general—began to fade in the United States, relegated to the hotel ballrooms of the Borscht Belt in the Catskill Mountains, where it still catered to an older, mainly Jewish

Beatles to U.S. youth than the remnants of a Latin tradition that appealed mainly to their parents. By 1965, a casual fan surveying the Latin music scene in the United States would undoubtedly have surmised that the glory days of Cuban music were over and that, like the Big Band sound or Dixieland jazz, it was becoming increasingly irrelevant to popular culture, a relic to be remembered with fond nostalgia and little else. Such an observer could not have foreseen the explosion that in the following decades was to thrust Cuban music once again to the forefront of pop culture, eclipsing its previous popularity, not just in Havana and New York but across the entire globe. That explosion, of course, was *salsa*.

**SALSA** The resurgence of Latin music was not meant to occur on the sunny islands of the Caribbean but rather in the urban streets of New York City. In contrast to the urbane, sophisticated bandleaders who propelled the New York Latin music scene in the 1930s and 1940s, Cuban musicians in the United States after the 1960s identified much more with the *barrios*, the ethnic neighborhoods they shared with Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in East Harlem and Queens. It is from these *barrios* that the salsa movement emerged, the most important Cuban style to develop outside of Cuba. The term itself (which simply means "sauce") conveys the mixture of exotic hot spices that is often identified with Caribbean cultures, and more importantly, with the colorful neighborhoods of New York.

The exciting new sound was developed by U.S.-born or U.S.-based musicians such as Jimmy Sabater and the trombonist Willie Colón, a Puerto Rican from the Bronx who collaborated with vocalist Héctor Lavoe and Panamanian songwriter Rubén Blades to celebrate the experiences of *barrio* life. The epicenter of the *salsa* movement was New York's Fania Records, founded in 1964 by the Dominican flutist Johnny Pacheco. Fania Records was the "Latin Motown" and early on signed and promoted most of the luminaries that went on to define *salsa* for decades, including pianist Eddie Palmieri, *conguero* Mongo Santamaría, drummer Ray Barretto, and later, Tito Puente and Celia Cruz. With the Castro regime tightly controlling musical exports, these musicians could no longer look to the island as a direct source of inspiration, so they began to develop their own version of the Cuban sound.

*Salsa* shed the romantic expressivity of the *son* in favor of a faster, livelier rhythm. Like the *son*, it has two parts: the main body of the song, followed by the faster *montuno*, where the singer and chorus alternate quickly in call-and-response style. Bass, piano, and brass (usually trumpets and trombones) play important roles, with improvisatory sections that draw directly from Latin jazz. Percussion instruments are invariably at the forefront, particularly the timbales, congas, and bongos. Unlike the traditional *son* groups, salsa bands have often become spectacular outfits with smooth production values, flashy lighting, and dazzling choreography—often by scantily clad backup singers performing fabulous dance moves on stage.

*Salsa's* roots are decidedly in the Cuban *son* and in the Afro-Cuban drumming tradition, but also in the Puerto-Rican *bomba* and *plena*. Many of

descent, causing some to claim that *salsa* is more a Puerto Rican phenomenon than a Cuban one. But *salsa* is also a pan-Caribbean (and even pan-American) development, influenced by styles and cultures from numerous countries including Panama, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, and even Brazilian *samba*. Combined with the ever-present jazz influence, the result was a rich musical gumbo that in the 1970s infected the Spanish-speaking areas of New York and Miami, as well as Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean (but, significantly, not Cuba). Soon, other countries began infusing features of the hot new style into their own traditions, notably the Colombian *cumbia* and the racing Dominican *merengue*.

**Recommended Listening:** “Pedro Navaja” and “Siembra” by Ruben Blades, from the CD *Siembra*.

**Recommended Listening:** “La Murga” by Willie Colón, from the CD *Best of Willie Colón*.

### CDI, Track 14: *Salsa*: “Las calaveras”

**Music and Lyrics:** Elvis Botero (1988)

**Instrumentation:** trombones, piano, bass, *güiro*, conga drums

**Notes:** This 1988 hit by the Colombian group The Latin Brothers shows the extent of salsa’s expansion throughout Latin America. The accompaniment consists of the continuous *montuno* piano pattern, complemented by the bass and percussion. Over that pattern, the singer (Brigido “Macondo” Chaverra) and the trombone choir (a trademark of Colombian and Venezuelan salsa) trade off melodic statements. The lyrics reflect concerns with race and class that were historically present in Colombia: The poor Black man was beloved by the (presumably) Black townspeople; the White landowner was not. The moral of the story is that in death all are equal, and that any advantage obtained in life is only temporary. This message is reinforced in the call-and-response section (also called *montuno*), which begins at 2:33. The chorus of musicians, in a comical nasal voice meant to depict singing skeletons, repeat the moral of the story, while the soloist expands on the theme.

Se murió el negro Simón, El fruterito del pueblo. Como querían a ese negro En toda la población. Y murió el viejo pipón. “Cuál pipón?” El hacendado del pueblo. Y a los dos los enterraron En el mismo cementerio. Y a los dos los enterraron En el mismo cementerio. Miren que casualidad Si a la fosa van a dar.	<i>Simón the Black man has died, The town fruit seller. How that Black man was beloved Throughout the town. And the old fat man died. “What fat man?” The town’s wealthy landowner. And both were buried In the same cemetery. And both were buried In the same cemetery. And what a coincidence, They’ll be placed in the same grave.</i>
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Miren que casualidad  
Si a la tumba van a dar.

*And what a coincidence  
They’ll be placed in the same tomb.*

Al rico le hicieron carrosa,  
Al negro sencillo ataúd.  
Que lo adornaban con flores  
De la Negra Sepherina.  
Y una marcha funeral  
Veo pasando que camina,  
Y una marcha funeral  
Veo pasando que camina,  
Y yo me le pegué atrás  
Pa’ presenciarla en seguida.

*The rich man got a fancy hearse,  
The Black man a simple coffin,  
Adorned with flowers  
By the Black woman Sepherina.  
And I saw a funeral march  
Passing by,  
And I saw a funeral march  
Passing by,  
And I fell in behind  
To witness it directly.*

Y el elenco concluyó  
Porque la noche llegó.  
Y dormían los dos difuntos  
El negrito y el pipón.  
Y dormían los dos difuntos  
En un eterno sopor.  
Después de un tiempo pasado,  
Pa’ terminar mi relato,  
Me fui para el campo santo  
Y encontré dos calaveras.  
Elas no tenían nariz  
Pero sé que blancas eran.  
Elas no tenían nariz  
Pero sé que blancas eran.  
Y que paso, si al final, camará . . .

*And the gathering came to an end  
At nightfall.  
And the two dead men slept,  
The Black man and the fat man.  
And the two dead men  
Slept together in eternal rest.  
After some time passed,  
To finish my story,  
I went to that cemetery  
And found two skeletons.  
They didn’t have any noses  
But they were both White.  
They didn’t have any noses  
But they were both White.  
And wouldn’t you know it, in the end,  
comrade. . . .*

**Montuno:** Las calaveras todas  
blancas son.

**Montuno:** *All skeletons are White on the  
inside.*

**Soloist:**

Multicolores por fuera,  
Por dentro un solo color.  
No importa como te mueras,  
Si solo es un vasilón.  
Como el gordo y el negrito,  
El frutero y el pipón.  
No hay diferencia de raza,  
Ni tampoco religión.  
Es el color de la tuya y la mía,  
Como la del mundo entero.  
Aquello del campo santo,  
Un mensaje verdadero.  
Así que componte garallón!  
Aprovecha lo que queda, Mancual  
Y no pierdas la ocasión.

**Soloist:**

*Multicolored on the outside,  
On the inside only one color.  
It doesn’t matter how you die,  
It is all just a joke.  
Just like the fat man and the Black man,  
The fruit vendor and the landowner.  
There’s no difference  
In race or in religion.  
It is the color of yours and mine  
And everyone else’s in the world.  
That business from the cemetery,  
A real message.  
So pull yourself together man!  
Take advantage of what’s left,  
and don’t miss the opportunity.*

Si al final lo que queda de tí,  
De Roberto,  
de Luis o de mí es la calavera.  
Fijate porque razón  
Hay tanta calavera  
Si te llevan al panteón  
Y tu sabes lo que queda.

*For in the end what's left of you,  
Of Roberto,  
Of Luis or myself is the skeleton.  
Think of why  
There are so many skeletons.  
If they take you to the cemetery,  
You know what will remain.*

U.S. mainstream culture had to wait for the meteoric rise—and equally meteoric decline—of disco in the late 1970s before it too was infected by the Latin phenomenon. In the 1980s, much of the U.S.'s first contact with Latin music took place with the sounds emerging from South Florida. Miami's Little Havana neighborhood was home to an older generation of Cuban exiles who for more than two decades had combined a politically charged and sometimes violent anti-Castro rhetoric with a deep nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Cuba. But a newer, more forward-looking generation was beginning to assimilate the rhythms of their Cuban past with U.S. pop culture. In particular, the Miami Sound Machine, founded by Emilio and Gloria Estefan, successfully blended shiny contemporary U.S. pop with the rhythms of *son* and *salsa*, most notably in their 1985 hit "Conga", a reworking of the 1940s carnival dance. Other important artists emerging from South Florida include Willie Chirino, and the recent emigrée Albita.

**Recommended Listening:** "Conga" by Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine, from the CD *Gloria Estefan—Greatest Hits*.

Meanwhile, back in Cuba, musicians kept developing their own styles, often based on their rich history, but they were increasingly influenced by events outside the island. Cuban musicians in the 1970s and 1980s, did not use the term *salsa*, but other names such as *songa*, the style espoused by Los Van Van. *Salsa* itself, long banished from its homeland, finally came full circle in the late 1980s when some of the *salseros*, including the Venezuelan Oscar D'León, began performing in Cuba, returning to the island its missing musical legacy. The Cubans readily embraced the new style and without missing a beat developed their own version called *timba*, which quickly rose to popularity first within Cuba, and eventually abroad, with such bands as NG La Banda. The timing for *salsa*'s homecoming was propitious, as the revitalization of Cuba's music scene became an important source of revenue for the hard times that Castro's cash-strapped regime would soon endure.

**THE 1990s** The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 greatly affected Cuba's economy and had a major impact on musical developments. The Castro regime began emphasizing tourism, directed mostly towards Europe and Latin America. Controls and regulations on musicians were significantly relaxed, allowing

touring and even recording abroad, notably in Spain, providing a lucrative source of foreign capital. The proliferating demand for Cuban music also meant that many musicians who had been around for decades on the island suddenly gained an international following, most notably the now-famous integrants of the Buena Vista Social Club, discussed earlier. Afro-Cuban sounds also began morphing with other styles, including rock, pop, Brazilian sounds, jazz, and rap, and fusion bands were popping up everywhere. Carlos Varela took the *nueva trova* tradition and infused it with a 1990s alternative-rock style. Rap music, first heard by Cuban youth over the airwaves that came across from Miami, began making inroads. Many Cuban Latin rap artists took their African roots seriously and incorporated them into their music. The appropriately named group Orishas combines traditional Afro-Cuban drumming, *son* orchestration, and rap cadences to promote an innovative contemporary style that is distinct and original. Cuban hip-hop and house music began appearing in Havana clubs, just as their Cuban-American counterparts were appearing in clubs in New York and Miami.

**Recommended Listening:** "Represent" by Orishas, from the CD *A lo Cubano*.

By the turn of the millennium, things looked much brighter on the island than they had a decade earlier. The result of the Castro reforms was the continuing survival—indeed, the flourishing—of Cuba and its music into the twenty-first century. Latin music continues to shine brightly both in Cuba and in the United States. The Tropicana still delights tourists in Havana with the sounds of its past and present, while New York and Miami remain important centers for a new generation of Cuban musicians. The forefathers of these *salseros*, those who left the island in the glory days of the 1930s, could probably not have predicted the heights to which their music would rise.

## PUERTO RICO

### Historical Overview

Puerto Rico, though much smaller than Cuba, has had a history similar to that of its western neighbor. Until the twentieth century, it had been occupied by only one European power—Spain—despite numerous English and Dutch attempts to capture it. In 1508, the Spaniards, led by Juan Ponce de León (later discoverer of Florida) established an important settlement near the present capital of San Juan, including military forts to repel foreign invaders. Significant tobacco, coffee, and sugar plantations were established in coastal areas, though the island never reached the level of wealth that Cuba, Haiti, or Jamaica did, and its importance was more strategic than economic. By the same token, the lack of large agricultural operations meant that slavery was not as pronounced. Having managed, like Cuba, to avoid the nineteenth-century revolutionary movements of the continent, Puerto Rico was absorbed by the United States in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. The island became an official U.S. territory in 1917 and in 1952 became the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.